Freedom Watch

Citizens Project

This is a PAID INSERT

Understanding intelligent design

By David J. Weiss

Responding to recent national news coverage regarding the teaching of intelligent design in public schools, Citizens Project has produced the following FAQs to help local residents understand the differences among evolution, intelligent design, and creationism. While only an excerpt follows below, please visit our website www.citizensproject.org to read the full text and access several web links of organizations and media responding to this issue.

Is Intelligent Design (ID) just creationism?

Not exactly. Creationists believe the account of the origin of the universe and people as described in the Old Testament of the Bible. These people believe that Adam and Eve were the first people, and evolution is not an appropriate way to explain the origins of life on earth. However, some proponents of ID such as Michael Behe believe in evolution, though originally controlled in some way by a "designer", which many believe is God. Other ID proponents such as William Dembski seem to believe that evolution is not possible, and that the "designer" — or God — is the only way to explain the origin of human beings.

Another view of ID is that it is a way to introduce creationism into the science classroom under the guise of science. Although ID is not creationism as relates to the Old Testament, both ID explanations of the development of species involve a supernatural force to explain the physical world. *See the New Yorker article referenced below for a good summary of these ideas.*

Isn't ID considered an equally valid theory? Isn't there a lot of research indicating that ID is just as rational and legitimate as evolution?

No. The National Academy of Sciences has indicated that ID is not scientific and should not be taught in a science curriculum. Specifically, the NAS says that ID proponents are "attempting to introduce religious views of the origins of life into the public schools". See their web links.

Someone doing a search on ID using SciFinder (perhaps the best way to search the scientific literature) will find that there are no scientific publications on ID. In fact, there are no publications in the scientific literature (including the journals *Nature* and *Science*) with "intelligent design" in their title that discuss the origin and evolution of species. There are books, videos, conference abstracts, etc., that ID advocates will tell you are proof of an intelligent design, but these are *not accepted* by the scientific community in that way, even if they have made it into some form of publication. That doesn't mean that scientists are biased; it is just an indication that the research of the ID community does not have recognized scientific validity.

SAVE THE DATES!

Citizens Project's SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE SURVEY will be available October 6th

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SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE FORUM

Monday, October 16th at the City Auditorium 221 E. Kiowa St. 6:30-8:00 p.m. reception to follow

moderated by Colorado College President Dick Celeste

Community Conversations: Sara Thomas and Shelby Knox

Sara Thomas interned with Citizens Project this summer and is the lead plaintiff in the current lawsuit against School District 11 for denying access to a Gay Straight Alliance at Palmer High School in Colorado Springs. She is now a sophomore at Grinnell College in Iowa.

Shelby Knox is a student who was recently featured on PBS's Point of View series for her tireless work for comprehensive sexual education at her high school in Lubbock, Texas. She is now a sophomore at the University of Texas – Austin.

Citizens Project (CP) asked these two, as leaders of a rising generation of activists passionate for equal rights and the separation of church and state, to converse, reflecting on their experiences. We are proud of youth who take on these issues, and would be pleased to support other such initiatives in Colorado Springs.

CP: As a young person, how did you feel navigating the policy process in your local school district? Did you know of another student's attempt to change a policy?

Shelby: At the time, I didn't see what I was doing as such an organized movement. I saw a problem and knew that, as a student in the school district, my voice could be powerful. I thought that once the school board heard from one of its students that the sex education policy was not working it would immediately listen and be willing to discuss changes. After their initial rejection I found myself looking at the work as a movement toward change, now working against the powers that governed the school board. In a way, that was more empowering because I felt like I was fighting a dangerous and destructive policy being perpetrated by adults who knew that it was dangerous. At the time, I did not know of any other teens working to change a policy. It would have been helpful to have a model to follow, or a teen who had done the same thing, to talk to.

See **Conversations** page 2

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Conversations

from page 1

Sara: I had a very similar experience. I knew that a Gay/Straight Alliance was needed and that students were being harmed by the lack of open support. I never really got to the place where I felt like I was in a movement. I saw what I was doing as something that needed to be done. It wasn't until the school district started renegotiating the clubs/organizations policy that I really began to look at policy and what it meant to me and to the other students in the school. I had some knowledge of other students working for gay-friendly policies, but I didn't have as much knowledge about their experiences as I would have liked … in fact, it wasn't until I talked to the ACLU that I realized the school had been faced with a similar situation in 1999. I absolutely know what you mean about having another teen to talk to. I was lucky in that I got to talk to the girl responsible for starting a GSA at Lewis-Palmer, a high school in another Colorado Springs district. It was nice to know I wasn't the first one. I can imagine that you felt like you were carving a new path.

Shelby: I knew that there had been another sex education fight ten years prior but the main instigators were adult medical professionals. They were considered left-wing weirdos and promptly dismissed. It was hard to believe that Lubbock had known about this problem for so long and had yet to do something about it.

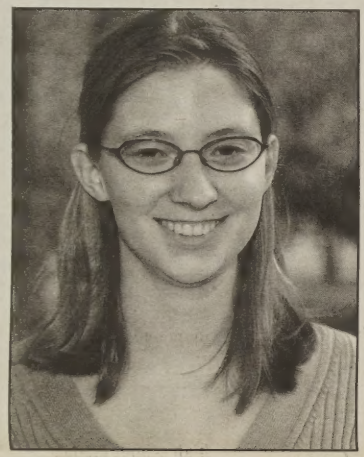
CP: What made you feel that you should be the one to take on this fight?

Shelby: I saw so many people who had been affected by the lack of sex education. Many girls were pregnant and students were afflicted with STI's and had no one to ask for help because the policy forbade such a discussion. I joined the Lubbock Youth Commission, a city group designed to give teens a voice. We unanimously decided to work on sex education, which was not what the city government expected. I became the spokesperson and began to learn more and more about the difference between abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education. I knew that as a Christian young woman I might be able to have an impact on the leaders of the city, most of whom were also Christians. I also felt that no one else was talking about it and that it should not be hidden for any longer. Too many people were affected for this problem to be swept under a rug.

Sara: The GSA in itself was no hardship, I knew a club needed to exist and I had the time and energy and passion needed to initiate it. When the school said no, I was so outraged, I don't think I ever thought about saying "okay" and letting it go. I had too many experiences with friends feeling isolated to not do something to fight the intolerance.

CP: Were there adults other than your parents that supported you, and what characteristics did you seek out in an adult ally?

Shelby: My parents were obviously wonderful and my biggest allies. The Lubbock Youth Commission had a great adult advisor who worked at the Texas Department of Health. He provided us with information and materials, but stood back and let us make mistakes. I think that we learned more from his quiet advice than we would have learned had he instructed us on what to do. I personally had several female mentors who provided support and encouragement during my high school years. I had a wonderful government teacher who taught me more about political rhetoric and how to articulate my ideas in an intelligent and coherent manner. I also found great friends and supporters in the two women who made the film. They were the first feminists I had ever met and they constantly reminded me that I was strong enough to deal with whatever came along. Knowing that they were there by my side, along with my parents and grandparents, always helped me stay focused. I have always been able to connect better with adults, especially women. I look for people who are willing to let me have my own ideas and ask questions.



Sara Thomas is now a sophomore at Grinnell College in Iowa.

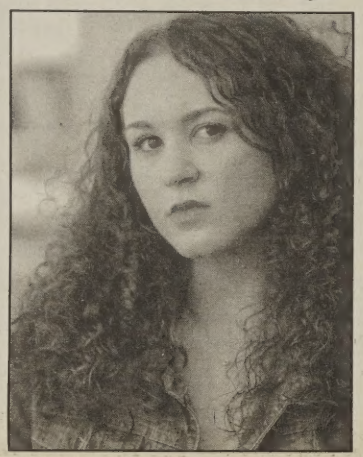
Sara: I really like that you had such strong connections that influenced your feminism. I secluded myself in some ways during the process of the lawsuit. I felt, in some ways, like I was gaining a lot of attention from people who wouldn't have known me otherwise. It was important to me that I kept close to the people I knew supported me and, even more, would support me no matter what I ultimately decided about the lawsuit and the GSA. I wanted to be confirmed as a person and not as an activist, if that makes sense.

CP: What's happening now in your school? Is there someone who is trying to fill your shoes?

Shelby: There are not any budding young activists on the sex education issue. There has been no change in the sex education policy, although a fifteen-year-old student became infected with HIV and passed it on to four other students. However, there are students who have formed a new GSA and are planning to sue the school board. They are making sure they have an airtight case and strong leaders.

Sara: Does that frustrate you? That you worked so hard and nothing has happened?

Shelby: It does frustrate me. I feel as though we started something really important and change might have been made had I not had to go away. However, I am encouraged that the story of sex education in Lubbock is being told across the nation in the form of this film. I hope that parents and students see it and recognize that comprehensive sex education is a vital part of any school curriculum. I continue to work hard on this issue and pressure Lubbock officials to change the policy. Having to respond to this film on a national level has to have put some pressure on them to take another look at their programs.



Shelby Knox is now a sophomore at the University of Texas – Austin.

Sara: I bet. I know, for me, the most important community figure was my associate minister, Benjamin Broadbent. You seem to have had an entirely different experience on that front. How were your experiences influenced by your religious community, and how did you finally come to terms with your budding religious beliefs?

Shelby: Oddly enough, I began fighting for better sex education without ever considering it as a religious issue. I felt that it had to do with common sense and health rather than morality. I also understood that teens are not rabid animals; telling them about sex and sexually transmitted diseases will not incite them to go experiment. My church, however, felt very differently. They thought that telling kids anything more than "just don't do it" was encouraging them to have sex. I know more about sex-ed than almost anyone my age and have remained abstinent! It was difficult at first to be condemned by Pastor Ainsworth and ostracized by my youth group. I was told many times I was headed for hell, especially after I began working with the GSA. I finally decided that it was God's place to judge, and not mine, and that discrimination was never right, especially in the name of religion.

Sara: I can't even imagine having to battle my school, my church, and my personal beliefs all at the same time.

Shelby: It was difficult, but I had a great support group composed of parents, friends, and mentors to help me. You also have to remember that I did do other things during high school, although the film could not really show that. I escaped to my singing and studying quite often.

CP: What could adults do to help support students, or what could they have done better to support you while you were in school and working on these issues?

Shelby: I think that there is a myth out there that students are apathetic beings who do not wake up to the real world until they graduate from college. Adults do a lot of harm by spreading this myth, basically telling children they are not supposed to care. Adults should encourage activism work from teens, supporting their work and allowing them to discover where their interests lie. They can provide information, transportation, or just moral support as students figure out what they believe.

Sara: I was surprised (not to mention disheartened) by the fact that so many teachers and school faculty members were too afraid to voice their support for gay students and the GSA. I like to think that adults don't let their fear get in the way of supporting students, but I was mistaken. I think that the one thing I would request from adults is for them to speak up for the students that are being harmed by the school district's actions.

Shelby: I noticed that a lot of teachers felt the same way I did about sex education, but could not voice it because they would lose their jobs. These teachers quietly voiced their support to me, which was personally helpful in a way.

Sara: I had the same experience with teachers quietly showing support, and, in some ways, that was encouraging. In another sense, it made me more upset because I don't like to think that fear can have so much power over a person's decisions.

Shelby: Well, I felt bad that the school board had told my teachers to make my life more difficult and they felt torn. The president of the school board wrote the principal to inform him that I was making trouble and should be watched closely. Soon after, I could no longer have hall passes. Most of my teachers, with the exception of the one who called me a baby-killer, went out of their way to be helpful to me inside of the school. I did understand the fear for their jobs; it is their livelihood.

Sara: I saw that too, I guess. And I do understand, but it was still hard for me to watch it happen to these people that I saw as movers and shakers.

Shelby: I guess I never really saw anyone in that way; the school board controls everything so closely in Lubbock.

CP endorses three ballot issues

Citizens Project endorses ballot issues based on compatibility with our mission.

Citizens Project's board of directors endorses Referenda C and D and lifting the mill levy cap in Colorado Springs School District 11. The state's budget crisis threatens many programs and services critical to our state and our civic life. Referenda C and D would help Colorado balance the state's budget, which has faced shortfalls over the last few years. In the case of school finance, Citizens Project firmly believes that strong public schools are the cornerstone of our pluralistic democracy. We support the infrastructure that public schools require in our region. Below are two articles on the issues with contact information for the "pro" campaigns.

Why does the Colorado Springs business community support Referenda C and D?

From a business perspective it's all about quality jobs, which fuel the economic engine and wealth of our community. So we ask ourselves and our legislators, "Are we providing adequate funding to those areas of our community that make us competitive in the global marketplace?" According to Michael Porter, professor at Harvard University, those areas are physical and information infrastructure; K–12 education; and higher education and specialized research centers. In short, the factors that make our community attractive to current and prospective employers are the ones that are slowly decaying as we just sit and hope for a long-term solution to our current budget crisis.

Colorado Springs, along with the rest of the state, was hit hard by the recent recession. El Paso County alone lost over 11,000 jobs in the past four years. State funding for higher education has been slashed repeatedly and is projected to go to zero by 2010. Tuition at schools such as the Pikes Peak Community College (PPCC) and University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) will continue to skyrocket, putting an increased burden on our lower- and middle-income families. Meanwhile, the higher education programs that are more expensive to offer — the ones that our businesses really need, such as nursing, engineering, and business — will be severely cut. Health care has been ruthlessly constrained over the past few years as state funding for Medicaid and human services has dwindled and is faced with another $217 million in cuts. Additionally, our most important local highway projects continue to sit on the back burner for lack of state funding. Support for K–12 education has been reduced, with a net loss of over $284 million during the past four years.

The factors that make our community attractive to current and prospective employers are the ones that are slowly decaying...

While we seem to just passively await a solution, Colorado is ranked near the bottom in many important areas: 48th in higher education funding; 46th in child immunizations; 45th in spending on highway repair; 48th in high school graduation rate; and 47th in K–12 funding as a share of state income, to name just a few. While this is all bad news, at current trends these problems will get much worse; the state's Legislative Budget Council is currently projecting an additional $400 million in cuts next year, which will primarily hit higher education and health care.

Referenda C and D have been proposed as a bipartisan compromise between the state legislature and Governor Owens as Colorado's Economic Recovery Plan. This proposal does exactly what the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights intended. It simply asks the voters to decide whether to retain the projected revenues in excess of the TABOR limit (about $98 per year per taxpayer) to spend on needed, specific projects during the next five years. Referendum C commits 90% of the estimated $3.7 billion surplus to critical funding for the restoration of vital services in health care, K–12 schools, and higher education. Referendum D is a bond issue that will fund 54 high-priority transportation projects across the state, including two major highway interchanges: I-25 and SH-16 (gate 20 at Fort Carson), and the interchange at I-25 and Highway 24 (our gateway to the mountains).

Colorado is facing a financial crisis. Over 350 organizations statewide have come together to give their support for these measures, and every business organization in Colorado Springs has strongly endorsed these referenda. If we are serious about the future of our community, and believe in investing in that future, then it is time to stop sitting and waiting for the perfect solution to our current fiscal crisis, and time to make a difference — one vote at a time. Vote yes on C and D.

— Mike Kazmierski
Co-chair of The Citizens Coalition for "Yes" on Referenda C and D Interim CEO and COO of the Colorado Springs Economic Development Corporation

To volunteer for the C and D campaign, email Ccyescandd@aol.com or visit the state campaign website to request a neighborhood kit http://www.voteyesoncd.com/modules/tinycontent/?id=2.

Understanding School District 11's current financing crisis

By Janis Hahn, Friends of District 11

In November of 2004, voters in School District 11 approved Measure 3F, which would allow repairs at all 61 schools, build two elementary schools to relieve overcrowding, expand Doherty High School, and purchase a permanent facility for CIVA charter school. However, Measure 3G, which would have allowed the district to raise its total mill levy to fund the bonds, was not approved.

Good schools are the foundation of good communities, and District 11 has served generations of local students well. However, age and wear and tear have taken their toll. The facilities staff do an excellent job of maintaining the buildings, but they can only do so much.

Many of the buildings' systems, such as heating, air conditioning, and ventilation, are so old that parts are no longer available. In some cases, if a heater goes out this winter, little could be done until a new one can be installed. Furthermore, as every day passes, construction costs increase; of course, this will make it harder to stay on budget when new schools are built.

The facility plan (Measure 3F) was figured out by a Citizens Task Force formed to review the needs of District 11. It is a cost-effective, well-thought-out plan. All of the money will stay in our community to benefit our students. An independent Citizens Oversight Committee will monitor spending to ensure that money is used as voters intended.

It is obvious that, last fall, voters intended to make sure that our investment in over a half-billion dollars worth of facilities and equipment be protected, when they approved Measure 3F. Unfortunately, the addition of Measure 3G was confusing to many people.

This November 1 it will be plain to everyone that voting yes on $131 million in improvements to our schools is the right investment for our children and our community. Please join us in voting yes for our kids and our schools.

Please visit www.cssd11.K12.co.us for specific information on how the passage of this measure will affect your neighborhood school. To volunteer for the Friends of District 11's campaign for lifting the mill levy cap, call 328-0011, email friendsofd11@yahoo.com, or visit www.friendsofd11.com

Citizens Project

Celebrate!

Join us in celebrating the contributions of Jim White, an activist who has tirelessly created a community that values diversity, equality, and religious freedom.

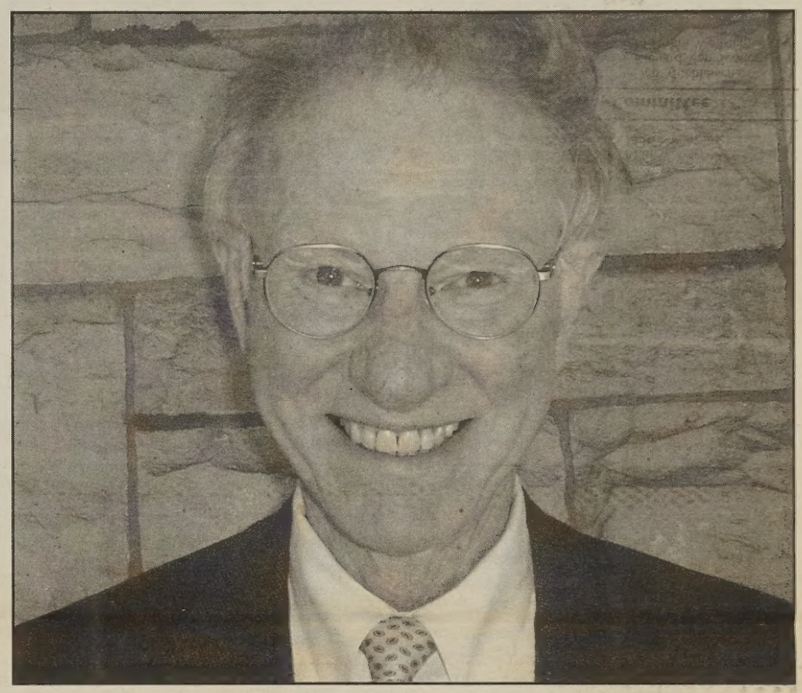
2ND ANNUAL
DIVINE AWARD PARTY
Thursday, September 22nd
from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
at the Warehouse Restaurant
(downtown)

RSVP: rsvp@citizensproject.org or call (719) 520-9899.

Dr. Jim White is Divine!

We are delighted to announce this year's recipient of the Divine Award. Please join us in celebrating the contributions of Jim White, an activist who has tirelessly created a community that values diversity, equality, and religious freedom. As the newly retired senior pastor of First Congregational Church, Jim's legacy as an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality — and for the separation of church and state — is felt by many members of our community.

The Divine Award is given annually to a person in the Pikes Peak region who has worked tirelessly to create a vibrant democracy in which equal rights are protected, individual freedoms are secure, and differences are respected, and where people fully participate in civic and community life.



Be part of the solution.

"Citizens Project gives the public an opportunity to report injustice, to be listened to, and then to be part of the solution."

– Sharon Berthrong, board member and CP supporter

You can make a difference. JOIN CITIZENS PROJECT,
Your voice for tolerance in the Pikes Peak region.

☐ Yes, I'd like to support Citizens Project! Enclosed is my contribution of:

☐ $50 ☐ $75 ☐ $100 ☐ $250 ☐ Other: $_____

(All donors receive a postage-paid subscription to Freedom Watch.)

☐ Sign me up for the Activist Network email: _____

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MISSION:

Citizens Project spotlights issues in the Pikes Peak region and mobilizes people to strengthen the traditional values of our nation: equal rights, individual freedoms, separation of church and state, civic engagement, and respect for diversity.

Citizens Project

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